

historical and cultural context

During the Industrial Revolution, from the late 18th century onwards, there was a widespread transition from small-scale production to huge, machine-operated factories.

The working class, or proletariat, is represented in Nineteen Eighty-Four by the proles.

Mao (1893–1976) established the People's Republic of China in 1949; **Lenin** (1870–1924) was the first leader of Communist Russia.

Fascism, a right-wing form of totalitarianism, suppresses opposition through terror and censorship.

George Orwell's two great novels about totalitarian rule – *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and *Animal Farm* – are commonly regarded as reactions to the communist leadership of the Soviet Union in the 1930s, especially the dictatorship of Joseph Stalin. Communist ideology, developed by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, originated in the mid-nineteenth century in response to what they saw as repression of working people caught up in the social upheavals of the Industrial Revolution. Engels, born in Germany, moved to England in 1842 and wrote *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (1844), a treatise on the pursuit of capitalist profit at the expense of working people's welfare. Marx was born, educated and married in Germany, and he lived in Paris and Brussels before moving to England. He and Engels wrote *The Communist Manifesto* (1848), which called on workers to unite in revolution against the ruling classes and establish the dictatorship of the proletariat.

This utopian vision of a classless society has never been achieved in any country where the leadership has described itself as "communist" or "socialist". Marx's later works were critiques of capitalism, and formed the basis for economic and social agendas in which ruling elites could be replaced by more egalitarian forms of society. The idea of classes pre-dated Marx and Engels, but they used an analysis of the ruling class, middle class (the bourgeoisie), working class and lower class (the lumpen proletariat) as the basis for action by the working class to take control and eventually develop a classless society, which would be based on communal ownership of property and the means of production. Although many left-of-centre political parties have been influenced by the theories of Marx and Engels, other philosophical elements, such as Christian Socialism and Rationalism, have directed them towards gradual, rather than revolutionary change. However, China, the former USSR and other communist states have tended towards dictatorial, totalitarian governments as a result of historical and local factors, such as the personalities and policies of Mao Zedong and Vladimir Lenin, as much as by the influence of Marxist theory.

Nineteen Eighty-Four was published in 1949, four years after the end of World War II, itself a struggle against fascism that reached back to the aftermath of World War I in 1918. That war, which turned the fields of northern France and southern Belgium into the killing fields of a

The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR or Soviet Union) formed after the Russian Revolution. It was a superpower until its collapse in 1991.

generation, marked the end of the old order of principalities and monarchies that had previously ruled Europe. Towards the end of World War I, in 1917, Tsar Nicholas II of Russia was overthrown by a range of revolutionary forces, which culminated in the coming-to-power of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, under the leadership of Lenin, Stalin and Leon Trotsky. During the 1920s, after Lenin's death, Stalin eliminated Trotsky, his remaining rival, and established himself as the virtual ruler of the Soviet Union. Stalin then consolidated his iron grip on power by ruthlessly suppressing dissidents, "eliminating" opponents, and forcing workers and peasants into state-run factories and collective farms.

Stalin (1879–1953), the USSR's own Big Brother, combined personal magnetism, harsh political theory and command of the armed forces to control and enslave the Russian people. His government became the supreme example of totalitarian rule, whereby a centralised government maintains complete control of every aspect of life and does not allow opposition parties to operate, under threat of exile, imprisonment or death. Stalin's secret police chief, Lavrenty Beria, headed the feared NKVD (the forerunner to the KGB), whose office at Moscow's Lubyanka Prison oversaw the torture and murder of countless numbers of alleged dissidents.

Stalin's disastrous economic policies directly led to the death by starvation of over five million peasants in the winter of 1932, and the entire period of his dictatorship was marked by privation, misery and fear. During the 1930s, policies such as the Five-Year Plan were pursued with fanatical disregard for the consequences. When unrealistic targets for production of crops, coal and steel failed to be met, peasants and farmers were punished and left short of food, fuel and adequate housing. Millions of peasants were forcibly located on collective farms after the abolition of private property. Those who resisted in any way were exiled to forced labour camps known as the Gulag. Some camps were located in freezing Siberian forests; others in the grim coal mines of the Ural Mountains. Meanwhile, favoured Communist Party officials had comfortable urban housing, cottages (dachas) in the country or beach houses at Black Sea coastal resorts. Artists, writers, musicians and other performers were forced to promote the party line or face punishment. The state maintained total control and Soviet subjects were not allowed to move freely within their own country, let alone abroad.

2 THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION

Elizabeth A. Wood

In the February Revolution of 1917 the Romanov tsars who had ruled Russia for three hundred years were forced to abdicate the throne. This left a political vacuum that Vladimir Lenin and the Bolsheviks took advantage of in the October Revolution of the same year.

In this chapter we must consider why the Romanov dynasty fell; why the intervening government (known as the Provisional Government) was unable to rule effectively between February and October 1917; and why the Bolshevik Party with Lenin at its head was able to position itself so as to seize power and begin to rule the country.

The fall of the Romanov dynasty had two principal causes: first, the regime's loss of legitimacy as it was battered by a series of crises over some 25 years; and second, the rising tide of workers' strikes and revolutionary sentiment (and organizing) among the intelligentsia.

The regimes of Alexander III, the penultimate tsar, and his son Nicholas II, the last tsar, were gradually defeated in a series of mishaps and misadventures when they were unable to safeguard their subjects. The first was the famine of 1891 when educated society and peasants alike felt that the tsarist government had contributed to the famine by exporting too much grain and by failing to provide sufficient relief. In 1896 the coronation of Nicholas II was the site of a mass stampede in which almost 1400 people died. In 1904–1905 the Russian government embarked on the Russo-Japanese war in the hope that it would stem the rising tide of revolution by having a “victorious little war.” Unfortunately, the results were antithetical to what the regime had hoped. The Russian sea and land forces were soundly beaten by the Japanese who were quite a new force in world history at the time. In 1905 Russia was engulfed in a giant revolution that overtook the whole country as peasants seized the landlords' lands, soldiers and sailors mutinied, workers went on strike with the support of their bosses; and railroad workers brought the country to a massive standstill for ten days in the largest general strike the world had ever seen. The European War (as World War I was then known) provided



ABOVE
Vladimir Lenin

a coup de grace in 1914–1917 when Tsar Nicholas I assumed the position of commander-in-chief, yet was unable to stop the deep and humiliating losses in the Russian side.

In February 1917 a delegation from the Duma (the Parliament that Nicholas II had finally permitted in October 1905) persuaded the tsar to abdicate. When his brother also refused to take the throne, the country was left with a power vacuum. A committee from the Duma began to rule, calling themselves the Provisional Government. They were not the only ones with aspirations to rule, however. At the same time the Soviet (or Council) of Workers', Peasants' and Soldiers' Deputies also claimed power, issuing orders that particularly affected the organization of the soldiers. Since the soldiers listened only to the Soviets, while educated society turned to the Provisional Government, a system of "dual power" was soon in place in which the Soviet and the Provisional government tried to rule in tandem.

This dual power was completely ineffective, however, as the two parts of the government could not agree on fundamental issues which needed speedy resolution: what to do about the war (whether to stay in the war and prosecute it to the maximum, or try to end the war "without annexations and without losses" or whether to declare the war a defeat and try to exit as quickly as possible regardless of the consequences); what to do about bread prices (which had skyrocketed) and disorder in the capital cities; and what to do about land redistribution (which was happening spontaneously throughout the countryside).

By the fall of 1917 the cities had become increasingly radicalized. Huge factories with 10,000 workers each were going on strike, incensed by horrific living conditions (long lines for food and fuel) and the failures of the Provisional Government to provide law and order. In late August 1917 General Kornilov, commander-in-chief of the Russian forces, attempted a coup to take over Petrograd and restore order. When this coup was put down by groups of workers acting spontaneously, forces on the left, especially Lenin, Trotsky and the Central Committee of the Bolshevik Party, were able to claim that a revolution by the workers in preparation for a dictatorship of the proletariat was absolutely necessary to keep the country from being forced into a right-wing dictatorship.

The Bolsheviks were able to seize power relatively easily in 1917 because they were not afraid to do so and to make ruthless decisions. Power, they felt, was "lying in the gutter," waiting to be seized. It helped that authority in Russia at this time was highly concentrated in Petrograd and, to a lesser extent, Moscow, with little military protection since virtually all the troops were at the front. It was thus relatively easy to seize the key ministries in a matter of hours. Other political parties which might have been popular with the general population had lost a great deal of credibility

during this period because they had had representatives in the Provisional Government which was by now massively discredited.

The Bolsheviks also, it must be remembered, had a program which was genuinely popular: "All power to the Soviets" (instead of the Provisional Government), land (i.e., let the peasants seize the land they want), peace (exit the war immediately); and bread (re-open the bakeries, let everyone have as much grain as they wanted).

Staying in power was much harder than seizing it. Although historians debate whether the Bolsheviks' involvement in the Russian Civil War was the result of deliberate act or an accidental response to events of the day, the war does seem to have benefited them as they were able to consolidate their hold over first the center and later the peripheries of Russia. This they did by offering bribes to people who were loyal to the regime in the form of increased rations (it cannot be overstated how hungry the country was with famine looming in the south in 1921), new landownership, new relations of authority and the like.

Once the Russian Civil War drew to a close in the fall of 1920 with the defeat of most of the White forces (comprised of supporters of both the Provisional government and the tsar), the Bolsheviks faced new problems of legitimacy and self-definition. They could no longer requisition grain in the name of supporting the war effort, nor could they easily require that men continue to serve in the Red Army. They did not have the excuse to continue to restrict trade in grain. Nor, they discovered, were they capable of running all industry from small factories to large ones.

In 1921 they instituted the New Economic Policy (NEP) which allowed some freedom of production and trade. Still, it failed to solve the question how Russia (now the Soviet Union) was going to reach the levels of industrialization and collectivized agriculture that the revolutionaries had dreamed of. The ruthlessness of the Russian Civil War combined with the magnificence of the dream of collectivization meant that many party members remained dissatisfied well into the 1920s, praying for the day they would be able to stage another revolution that would transport the country from semi-capitalism to communism. This, of course, laid the groundwork for Stalin's rise to power in the 1920s and 1930s.

The rise of the dictators

YOU will remember how, before the First World War, the big powers were divided into two rival alliances. In the 1930s new divisions were forming, this time between DEMOCRACIES and DICTATORSHIPS.

You have already seen (on page 86 in Unit A) how Britain is run as a democracy. The main features of a democracy are:

- Everybody (in Britain everyone over the age of 18) can vote and help choose the government.
- Voters have a choice between several political parties.
- A government is in power for a limited period (in Britain five years). After that there must be another election.
- Everybody, including the government, must obey the law of the land.
- Freedoms, such as the right to criticise the government or to protest against it, to belong to trade unions, and to follow any religion, are highly valued and in some democracies are protected by the law.

Powerful countries such as the USA, Britain and France followed this system in the 1930s, but many other countries had rejected it, as you can see from Source 1. Many countries had abandoned democracy and turned to dictatorship. Some countries, such as Germany and Italy, had FASCIST dictatorships. The USSR (previously the Russian Empire), had a COMMUNIST dictatorship.

1. As we investigate the story of three of these dictatorships, look for:
 - the features of a dictatorship and how it is different from a democracy
 - how economic problems helped the rise of the dictators.



SOURCE 1 Europe between the wars

Case study 1: the USSR

Russia was a vast country. But at the beginning of the twentieth century it was very backward. The vast majority of its people were peasants, and they were very poor. There was little industry.

Russia was governed by Tsar (Emperor) Nicholas. He was not elected, but kept himself in power by harsh laws. He had spies, or secret police, to discover opponents and get rid of them, usually by sending them to labour camps.

Russia's involvement in the First World War only made things worse. Nearly two million Russian soldiers were killed, and the army suffered heavy defeats. There was a severe shortage of food, and people were starving. In 1917 there were two revolutions, which brought the COMMUNISTS, led by Lenin, to power. Russia, together with the smaller states it controlled, was renamed the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). In 1924 Lenin died and within a few years he was replaced by Joseph Stalin.

The Communists ran the USSR as a dictatorship:

- No other parties were allowed to exist. Opponents were executed or sent to labour camps. Stalin sent about eight million people to labour camps, where many died.
- No one was allowed to have any open religious beliefs. Pictures and statues of Stalin were put up everywhere to encourage people to obey and almost worship him.
- All industry was taken over by the STATE. Industry grew very quickly in the 1920s and 1930s. The Communists also improved state education and health care for ordinary SOVIET people.
- Individual peasants were no longer allowed to own their own farms. Instead, they worked with other peasants in collective farms owned by the state. Peasants who objected were executed or sent to farm in remote northern regions. Well-off peasants, called *kulaks*, were killed in their thousands. But feeding the Soviet people was still a problem. In a terrible famine in 1932–33 five million peasants died.

All the other countries in Europe were worried about what had happened in Russia. They did not want similar Communist revolutions to take place elsewhere. The USSR became isolated and Stalin feared that it might be attacked.

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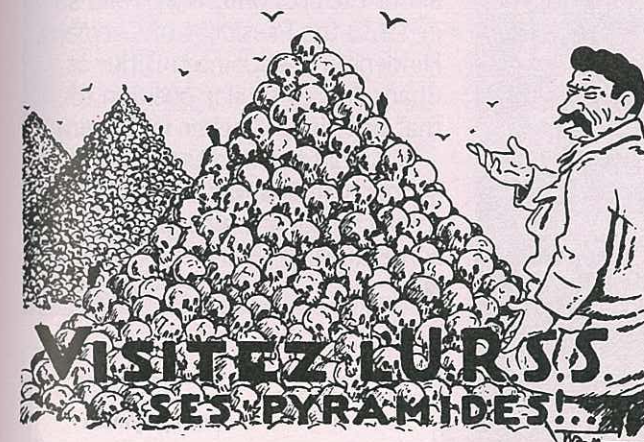
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SOURCE 2 A photograph of a Russian peasant family in 1921



SOURCE 3 A cartoon 'travel poster' published in the 1930s. The man on the right is Stalin. He is saying, 'Visit the USSR's pyramids'

1. Look at the family in Source 2. Do you think they benefited from Communist rule?
2. Look at Source 3. What is the artist saying about the USSR?
3. Source 3 was published in France by a Russian artist who had left Russia. Do you think he could have published his cartoon in the USSR if he had wanted?
4. Do you think people in Britain in 1917 would be worried about what was happening in Russia? (Your knowledge of Britain in the nineteenth century should help you to answer this question.)

Case study 2: Italy

Although Italy had been on the winning side in the First World War and many of its soldiers had been killed, it gained very little from the Treaty of Versailles. The Italians felt cheated.

In 1919 they were suffering from unemployment and high food prices, and many people were going hungry. There were strikes and demonstrations. Many rich people were worried that there might be a Communist revolution as there had been in Russia. They wanted a strong leader who could bring back order to the country. Many began to support Mussolini, the leader of the Fascist Party. His followers beat up Communists and other opponents. Mussolini promised to bring back strong government if he was in charge.

In 1922 thousands of Mussolini's followers announced that they were going to march on Rome. Fearing chaos and street battles, the King made Mussolini Prime Minister. Gradually Mussolini took over completely. He was soon a dictator.

Opponents of the Fascists were beaten up or imprisoned and other political parties were abolished. Workers were not allowed to go on strike. Mussolini made Roman Catholicism the official religion of Italy and so gained the support of the Pope.

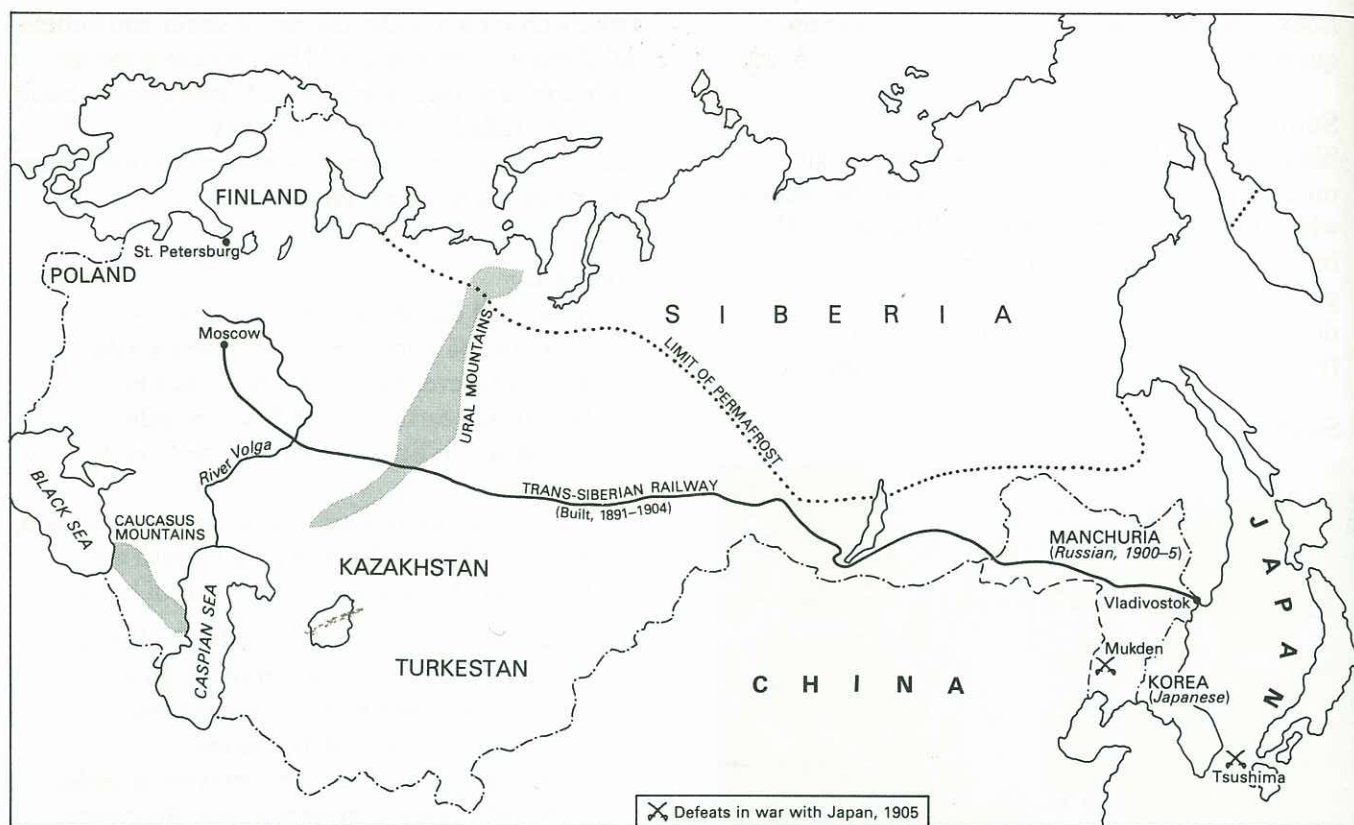
Mussolini also made great improvements in Italy's economy: he built new roads, he developed farming and industry, and he built huge dams to provide electricity. He said that his next aim was to build a great new Italian Empire to rival the Roman Empire thousands of years before.



SOURCE 4 A six-year-old boy's membership card of the Fascist youth movement. The card says 'In the name of God and Italy I swear to obey the orders of Mussolini and to serve the cause of the Fascist Revolution with all my strength and, if necessary, my blood.'

1. Find two similarities and two differences between the dictatorships in the USSR and Italy.

3/Russia from Empire to Soviet Union



Map 1 Russia in 1900

Russia at the beginning of the century

The Russian land and people

Russia is a huge country. But vast areas of Siberia were not inhabited in the early years of the century. The population was 133 millions. Eighty per cent of these were peasants. The peasants were becoming very discontented because they did not own the land on which they worked.

During the early years of the twentieth century Russian industry started to develop quite rapidly. Railways were built and the number of factories increased. Many peasants left their villages to work in the industrial towns. Living conditions

for many were dreadful.

The two most important towns in Russia at the beginning of the century were Moscow and St. Petersburg. St. Petersburg was the capital. When the First World War started it was renamed Petrograd and then, after the revolution, Leningrad, its present-day name.

The Government

Russia was ruled by the Tsar (the Russian word for Emperor) of the Romanov royal family. He was an 'autocrat', that is he had complete control of the government. He could appoint and dismiss ministers as he pleased. The Tsar's power was

strengthened by the belief that he was God's chosen ruler on earth.

In 1894 Nicholas II became Tsar. He was a weak rather than an evil man, too weak to manage the enormous problems from which Russia suffered during his reign.

In 1905 there was a revolution. This was partly caused because the incompetence of the government had led to Russia being defeated in a war with Japan (1904-5). The revolution was actually sparked off by the killing of hundreds of peaceful demonstrators in St. Petersburg. This was called, 'Bloody Sunday'. A revolution is a violent uprising of people to force a change of government. However, the revolution of 1905 did not bring many changes to

Russia at the beginning of the century

Russia. The Tsar had to agree to hold elections for a Duma (a parliament), but it was never allowed to have any real power.

By 1916 Nicholas and his wife Alexandra (the Tsarina) were becoming very unpopular. They were blamed for the sufferings of the country which we shall describe later. The Tsarina was especially unpopular because she was a foreigner, a German. At this time a strange holy-man named Rasputin had great influence over the Tsarina. This was another reason for her unpopularity. Rasputin had a very bad reputation and tried to become more powerful through her. He even arranged for the dismissal of many ministers and the appointment of quite incompetent ones. Rasputin's death was as strange as his life. Two noblemen plotted to kill him to save their country from his influence. They invited him to supper and gave him poisoned cakes and wine, yet these had no effect! More conspirators in an upstairs room kept playing and replaying a record of 'Yankee Doodle Dandy' while they were waiting. In desperation one of the nobles shot Rasputin. He appeared to be dead. But when they tried to move the body, Rasputin rose up and staggered out of the house. His body was later found in the river.

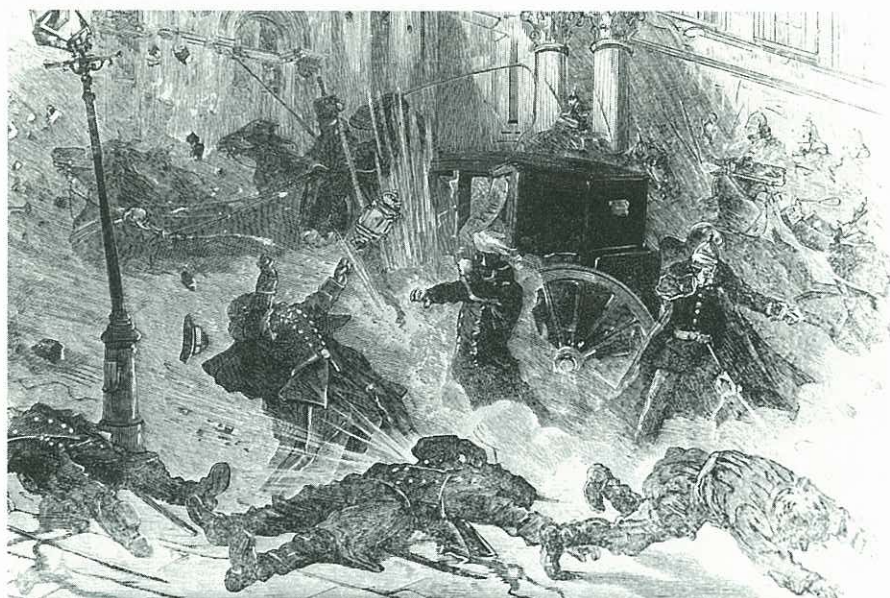
Opposition

Discontent with the Tsar's Government

Discontent with the system of government had been brewing for many years. Russia was very backward compared with west European countries like France and Britain. Different groups of people had different ideas about how to improve



Two Russian workers at the turn of the century. Why do you think living conditions were so bad for working people?



The assassination of Alexander II in 1881

matters. Some decided to use violence. For example, in 1881, the Tsar Alexander II was murdered by a bomb. In 1911 the Tsar's chief minister, Stolypin, was also murdered despite the fact that he was introducing reforms.

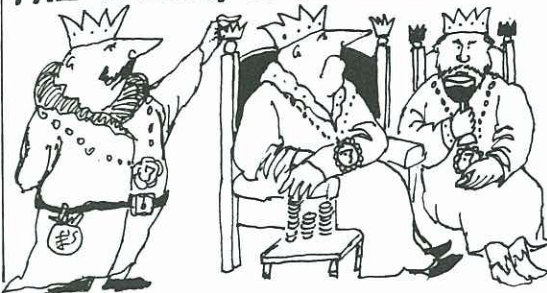
The government reacted by using their secret police, the 'Okhrana', to track down and arrest people who

were working against them. People who were arrested were sometimes sent to Siberia as a punishment.

In order to continue their work safe from arrest some people left Russia and settled in other countries. They organised political parties and printed newspapers that were smuggled into Russia.

Russia at the beginning of the century

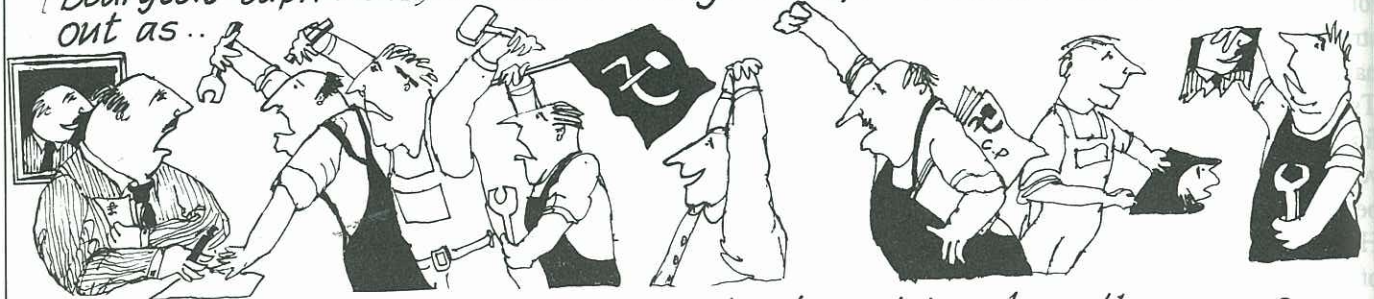
THE THEORY OF COMMUNISM



a) class conflict is the most important of all happenings throughout history



b) The final quarrel between social classes (below) is between the middle class (bourgeois-capitalists) and the working class (proletariat). This will break out as...



A REVOLUTION—this breaks out in industrialised countries where there are a large number of working-people in the towns to rise up in revolt.

c) After the revolution, the party rules the country for a while on behalf of the working class. This government is called the dictatorship of the Proletariat.



d) When all opposition to the new government has been crushed, no government is needed because all people are treated fairly and are contented.
"The state will wither away"



e) Then the Communist society comes into being. There are no different classes. All people are treated in the following way:

FROM EACH ACCORDING TO HIS ABILITY : TO EACH ACCORDING TO HIS NEEDS

Russia at the beginning of the century

The Communists

The most important of these groups were the people who believed that Karl Marx had shown the best way for progress. Marx was a German who lived much of his life in exile in Britain. He wrote some of his books and pamphlets in collaboration with his friend Engels. Their most famous was *The Communist Manifesto*. The last words of this are the following:

Let the ruling classes tremble at a communist revolution. The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win.

Working men of all countries, unite!

'Proletarians' are working-class people in the towns. Marx believed that these working people would become so unhappy that they would destroy the governments of their countries. Communism would then spread throughout the world.

It is not easy to explain communism in a few words. The cartoon

Nikita Khrushchev, prime minister of Russia in the 1960s, placing a wreath on the tomb of Karl Marx in Highgate cemetery, London



may help. A phrase that explains part of what it stands for is 'From each according to his means, to each according to his needs'. There would be no different social classes and no great differences of wealth.

In 1903 the Russian Marxists quarrelled among themselves. The more powerful group was called the Bolsheviks. Its leader was a man who took the secret name of Lenin to escape from the Tsar's police. His real name was Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov.

Effects of the First World War

By 1914, when the First World War started, the government was unpopular and many people were discontented with their standard of living. But as the war continued, the problems became far worse in the following ways:

1 More peasants moved into the towns as more and more weapons were made in the factories for fighting the war.

2 Prices rose very steeply. The price of food in the towns was a particular problem.

3 Millions of men and thousands of horses were drafted into the army. This had serious effects on the production of food on the farms.

4 The Russian armies suffered huge casualties. The soldiers therefore became very angry about the way the war was being managed.

5 In 1915 the Tsar took over as Commander-in-Chief of the Russian armies, so he came to be blamed personally for the defeats.

A queue for bread in Petrograd, 1917. Why do you think there was a shortage of food?



Revolution and civil war

The March Revolution

The events

By the end of 1916 to early 1917 the discontent in Russia was becoming very serious. Politicians in the Duma demanded that the Tsar introduce reforms. They wanted a new form of government. The working people of Petrograd went on strike and rioted, protesting especially about the price and scarcity of food.

The Tsar was completely incapable of dealing with these serious problems. In March 1917 discontented soldiers joined the rioters. The government had lost control. Twelve members of the Duma decided that they should take over. They forced the Tsar to abdicate. The revolution had occurred, but Russia's problems were, of course, by no means solved.

How did it happen?

Revolutions are very important events in History. Do you think it is possible for a revolution to happen without someone organising it very carefully? Historians disagree in their explanations for the revolution in Russia in March 1917. Here are three explanations:

- 1 The Empress and Rasputin were mainly responsible.
- 2 The First World War helped to bring the revolution about more quickly.
- 3 There was no obvious cause—the revolution was spontaneous. Which cause do you think was most important—the royal government, the war or 'it just happened'?

Note: In 1917 Russia was still using an inaccurate calendar. By that calendar, the March Revolution occurred in February and the November Revolution in October.



Alexander Kerensky, leader of the provisional government, March–November 1917

The Provisional Government

Continuing problems

Members of the Duma organised themselves into a Provisional Government (a temporary government until a new system of government could be organised). Kerensky was the prime minister.

But they discovered that governing Russia was very difficult, for the following reasons:

- 1 The First World War was still being fought and was going very badly. Many soldiers were deserting.
- 2 Prices were still rising and food was becoming very short in the towns.
- 3 The peasants were becoming so discontented that they started to take over the land from the landlords.
- 4 In Petrograd a Council of Workers, Peasants and Soldiers was formed as an alternative government. This was known as the Petrograd Soviet. 'Soviet' is the Russian word for Council.

The arrival of Lenin

In the spring and summer of 1917 the Bolsheviks, the main Communist party, were not very strong inside

Russia. Their leader, Lenin, was still in exile in Switzerland.

However, when the revolution broke out he arranged to travel back by train to Russia so that he could take control. In April he arrived at the Finland Station in Petrograd. A welcoming committee met him in the special room that had originally been set aside for the Tsar. An eyewitness wrote this description of the occasion:

'Lenin walked, or rather ran, into the "Tsar's Room" in a round hat, his face chilled, and a luxurious bouquet in his arms.' A representative then gave a little speech of welcome. Lenin replied: 'Dear comrades, soldiers, sailors and workers, I am happy to greet in you the victorious Russian revolution. . . . The Russian revolution achieved by you has opened a new epoch. Long live the worldwide socialist revolution!' Then Lenin was carried on top of an armoured car away from the station in a triumphal procession.

Compare Lenin's speech with the last words of *Communist Manifesto* on page 29. They both show the belief that the Communist (or socialist) revolution would be *world-wide*.

Revolution and civil war

The November Revolution

The Bolsheviks organise

Lenin immediately set about plans to take over control of the government. An attempt in July was unsuccessful and he had to escape to Finland for fear of being arrested.

By the autumn, however, the Bolsheviks were very much more powerful:

- 1 Their promises of reforms made them popular.
- 2 Another great leader of the Bolsheviks, Trotsky, was chairman of the Petrograd Soviet.
- 3 Thousands of workers had been given weapons to form 'Red Guards'. The Provisional Government could not rely on the loyalty of the army.

The Bolsheviks take over

Trotsky carefully organised a new revolution. On 6 November important buildings like the telephone exchange and government offices were captured. There was little violence. The warship *Aurora* fired a few shells at the Winter Palace, the government headquarters. Similar uprisings were organised in other main towns. Within ten days the Bolsheviks had taken over from the Provisional Government.

The careful organisation of the Bolshevik revolution is clear from the following eye-witness account by the American newspaper correspondent, John Reed:

Petrograd presented a curious spectacle in those days. In the factories the committee-rooms were filled with stacks of rifles, couriers came and went, the Red Guard drilled. . . . In all the barracks meetings every night, and all day long interminable hot arguments. Men literally out of themselves, living pro-

digies of sleeplessness and work—men unshaven, filthy, with burning eyes who drove with fixed purpose full speed on engines of exultation. So much they had to do, so much!

Lenin was the head of the new Bolshevik government. He took three most important actions:

- 1 He issued a decree giving the land to the peasants.
- 2 He declared that the war would be brought to an end at once.
- 3 He arranged elections for a Constituent Assembly (this is a kind of parliament for drawing up a constitution for a new system of government). But the Bolsheviks did not win a majority so Lenin stopped it meeting!

Lenin addressing a crowd. The man standing to the right of the platform is Leon Trotsky. In later years, after Trotsky had quarrelled with Stalin, this photograph was shown with the figure of Trotsky blotted out. Why do you think this was done?



A Red Guard standing in front of the throne in the Winter palace. The title of this painting is 'The inevitable'. Do you think pictures like this are important as propaganda?



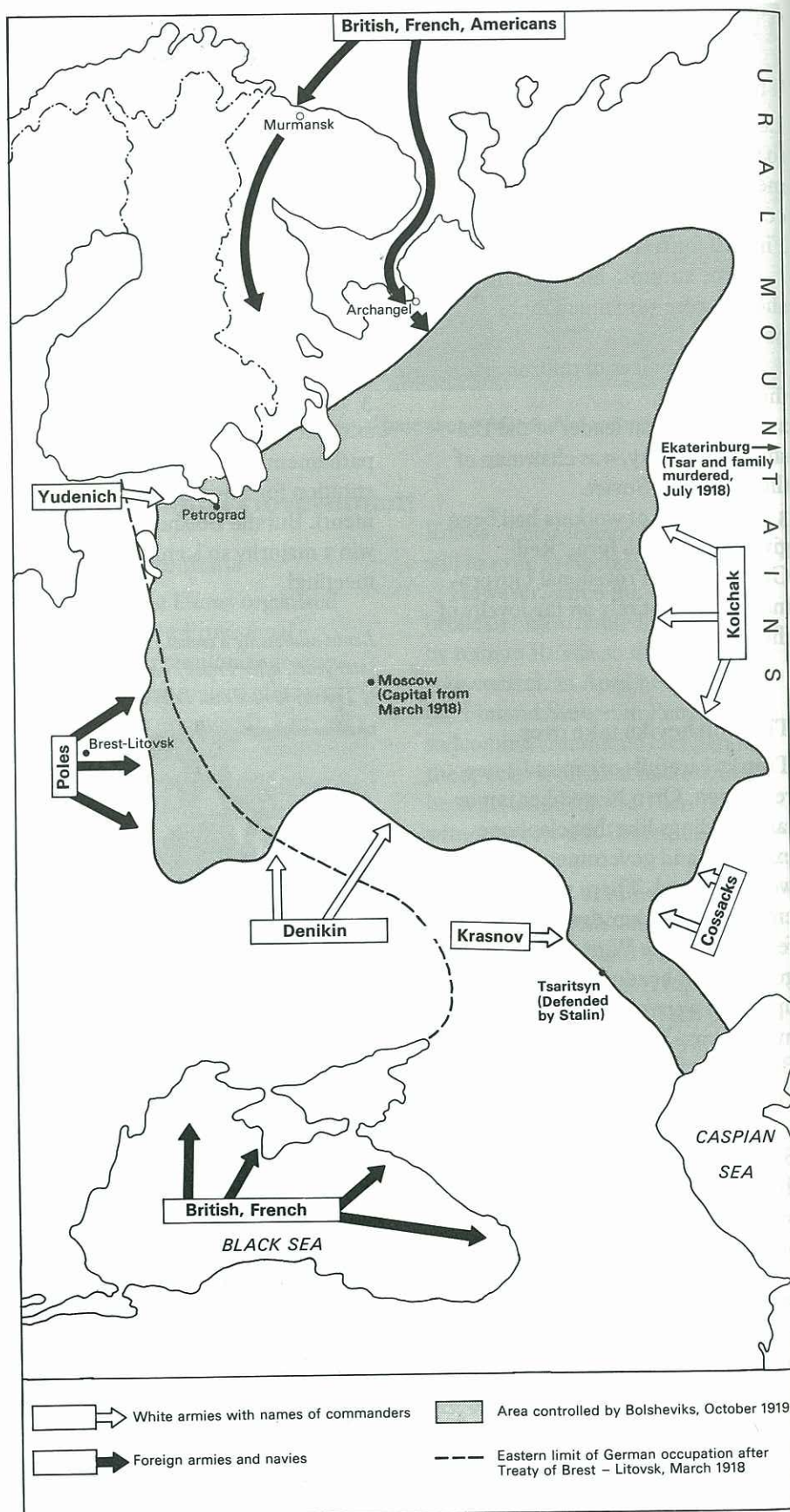
Revolution and civil war

Civil war

Many people disliked or were afraid of the Bolsheviks:

- 1 The supporters of the Tsar who wanted the return of the royal government.
- 2 Other politicians who wanted at least a share in the government.
- 3 The rich people because their land was being taken from them.
- 4 The Allies. The First World War was still being fought in the West. In 1918 the Bolsheviks signed the peace Treaty of Brest-Litovsk to end the war with the Central Powers (see p. 12). The Allies thought that any other government in Russia would continue the war. The Allies were also frightened that, as Lenin forecast, Communist revolutions would break out in other countries.

Civil war therefore broke out in Russia and lasted until 1920. The Bolsheviks (or Communists as we shall now call them) controlled the central block of European Russia as shown on Map 2. The Red (Communist) Army was commanded by Trotsky. The anti-Communist, White armies had no central command and were therefore very inefficient. So, despite being attacked by so many armies and navies as you can see on the map, the Red Army eventually won. But during the war the Russian people suffered in the most horrible ways. Both sides committed cruel acts, disease spread and the disorganisation of farming led to hunger, and eventually, widespread starvation. At the start of these troubles, in 1918, the royal family were taken to Ekaterinburg, beyond the Ural Mountains, and shot.



Map 2 The Russian Civil War

Revolution and civil war



Trotsky (left) with Stalin (right) before Trotsky's disgrace

Lenin's government

Lenin now had to face the enormous task of governing a country devastated by war, civil war and famine. What is more, few Russian people supported the Communists, especially as they had taken over factories and confiscated food during the time of the civil war.

In order to keep the Communists in control of the country and to cope with all these huge problems, Lenin made three main changes:

- 1 He set up the New Economic Policy (N.E.P.). This allowed working people like peasants to make a profit by selling goods they produced themselves.
- 2 He turned the country into the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (U.S.S.R.). The theory was that each of the provinces of this huge country would be semi-independent.
- 3 He set up a system of government as harsh as the Tsar's. A secret police force was organised, called the Cheka. By the early 1920s about one million people had become members of the Communist Party. It was these men who controlled the country.

Many people were disappointed that the Communist government had not brought a freer political

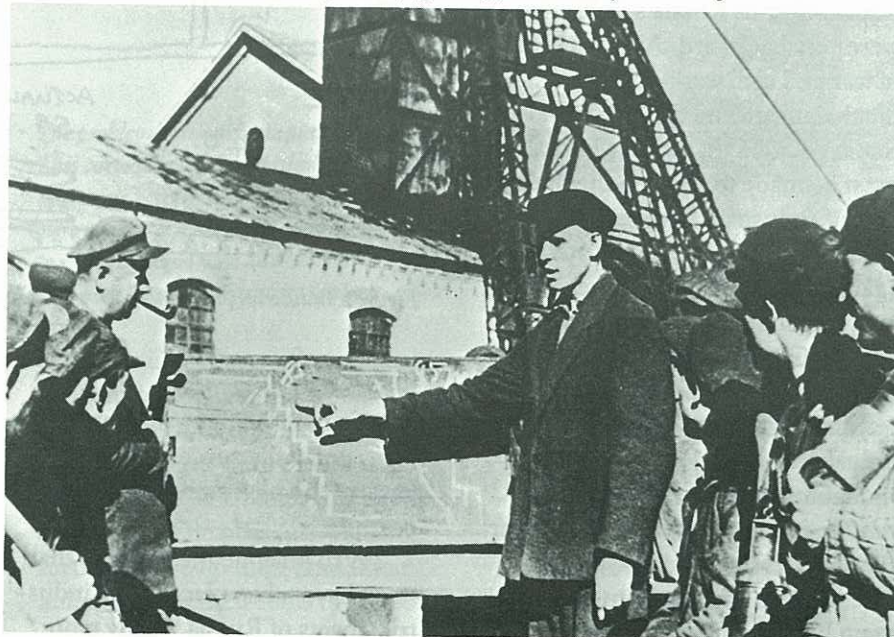
system. In 1921 the sailors at the naval base of Kronstadt rose in rebellion demanding more freedom. The uprising was put down by force by Trotsky.

Some historians think that Lenin's undemocratic system was just an emergency. We do not know, however, if he intended to change this system of controlling the country because he died in 1924. But he is still very much revered in Russia today. People queue to see his em-

balmed body in its tomb in Red Square in Moscow.

There were two rivals for replacing Lenin as the head of the government: Trotsky, who had been so important in both the revolution and the civil war, and a man called Joseph Stalin, who was the General Secretary of the Communist Party. Stalin won because he controlled the party officials throughout the country. Trotsky was expelled from Russia in 1929.

Stakhanov. This coal-miner, with two assistants, succeeded in producing 102 tons of coal in a 5³/₄ hour shift and was used as a symbol of efficiency for the rest of the country



Stalin

Stalin's character

Stalin was born in 1879. He ruled Russia from 1929, by which year he had defeated his rivals, until 1953, when he died. He is one of the most important men of the twentieth century. He was a dictator, that is he personally had complete control of the government.

Stalin was utterly ruthless in his governing of Russia. Many millions of people were sent to prison camps or died because of him. He worked very long hours in his rooms in the Kremlin, the headquarters of the government in Moscow. He was a secretive, lonely man, trusting no one. Although he terrified many people, he also tried to persuade the ordinary men and women of Russia that he was a kindly, all-powerful, almost god-like person. Artists and writers were encouraged to give that impression. Sympathisers outside Russia called him 'Uncle Joe'.

Industry

Compared with other main European countries Russia's industries were very backward. Also the years of war and civil war had caused much damage and disorganisation. Stalin decided that a huge effort must be made to develop the main, 'heavy' industries like steel. He was afraid that Russia might be attacked again, as she had been in the civil war, by countries who wanted to destroy Communism. Russia therefore had to be made strong and the way to be strong was to build up her industries.

Stalin decided to set targets for production in the form of Five-Year Plans. These involved vast increases. You can see from the diagram how ambitious they were.

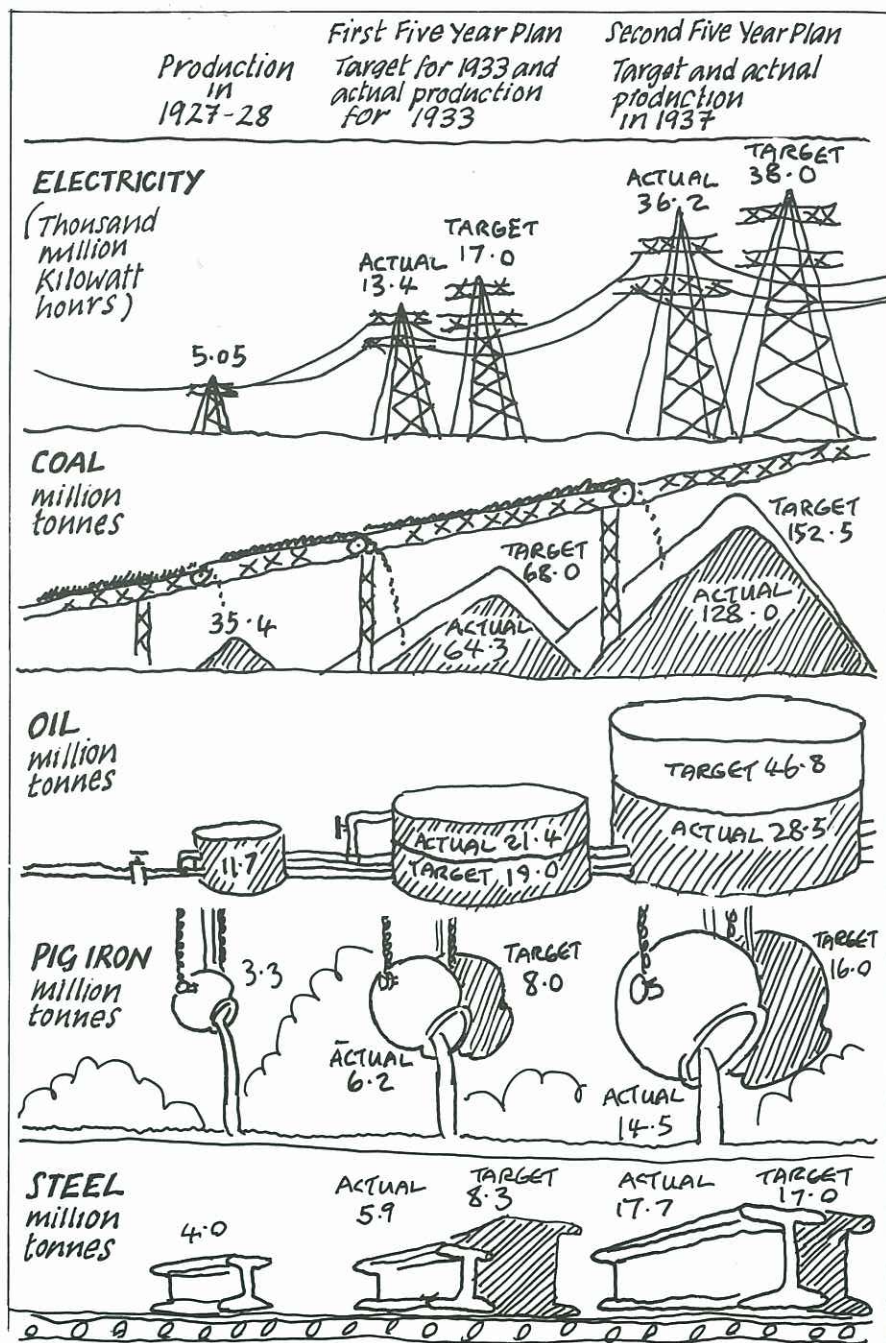


Figure 2 Industrial production. Five Year Plans and actual figures

What other information can you gain from these figures? Were the plans generally successful? Which parts of the plan were most successful?

Try to imagine the changes that must have taken place in the industrial towns of Russia. Many more

mines, factories, oil-refineries and generating stations had to be developed during the ten years 1928-38. Millions more workers were needed. In fact, during those ten years the proportion of the whole population living in towns increased from one-fifth to one-third.

Stalin

Stalin organised a great publicity campaign to persuade peasants to move to the towns and to encourage the workers to work extra hard. A man called Stakhanov devised a system for increasing coal-production. He became a hero. Other men who copied his example came to be called 'Stakhanovites'. You can see from the poster that Stalin looks very friendly. In fact, as we shall see later, millions of people suffered and died so that Russia could become a strong industrial country.

Agriculture

The problem

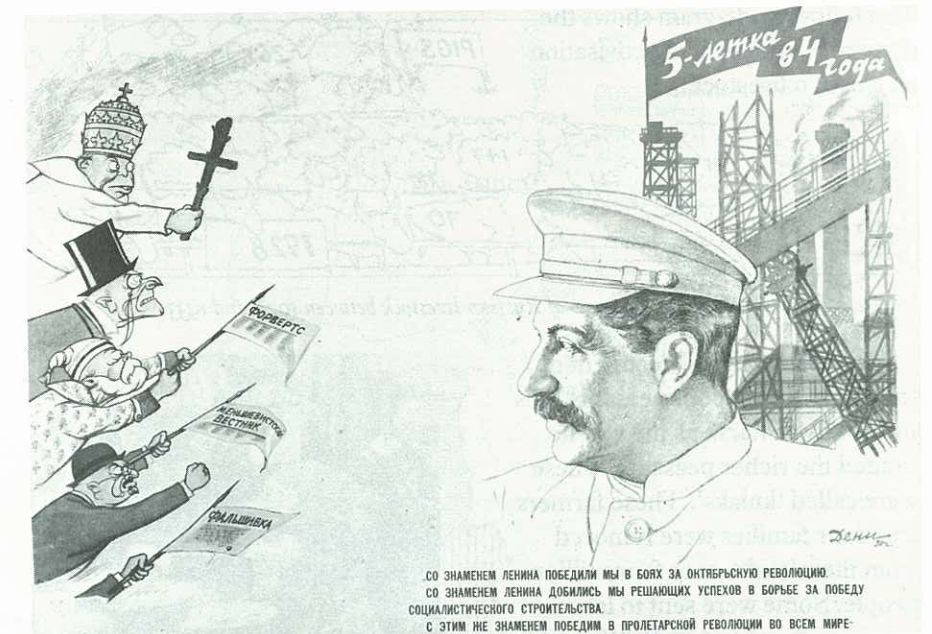
Russian farming was very backward indeed. Most of the peasants were extremely poor and used the most primitive methods to cultivate the land. Flails for threshing and even wooden ploughs were still widely used.

Yet Stalin urgently needed to increase the production of food. The first Five-Year Plan, as we have seen, needed a huge increase in the number of industrial workers. Food had to be available in the towns for them.

Stalin's solution

Stalin produced a scheme to solve all these problems. The small peasant plots would be joined together to form big 'collective' farms. These would have the following advantages:

- 1 They would be big enough to use modern methods of farming, including tractors.
- 2 A very large farm would need fewer peasants than the smaller plots separately. The surplus people could go to the towns to work in the factories.



This is a poster showing that Stalin is achieving the Five-year Plan in four years in spite of foreign enemies and 'wreckers' inside the country. It was produced in 1930 and contains the following quotation from Stalin: 'With the banner of Lenin we achieved decisive successes in the struggle for the victory of socialist construction. With this same banner we shall conquer in the proletarian revolution throughout the world'



The problem of the private plot. This cartoon from the Russian magazine Krokodil shows how difficult it was to persuade the peasant to spend as much time and care on collective land as on his private plot.

- 3 Communist Party officials could control the collectives through their organising committees.

The changes were introduced very quickly. The result was anger and chaos. The peasants were forced to give up their land, their animals, even their tools to the col-

lective. And in return the government took an increasing proportion of the grain harvest! Many peasants managed to keep their own vegetable plots and worked harder on these than on the farm. Many also slaughtered their animals rather than give them up to the collective.

Stalin

The following diagram shows the disastrous effect of collectivisation on Russian livestock:

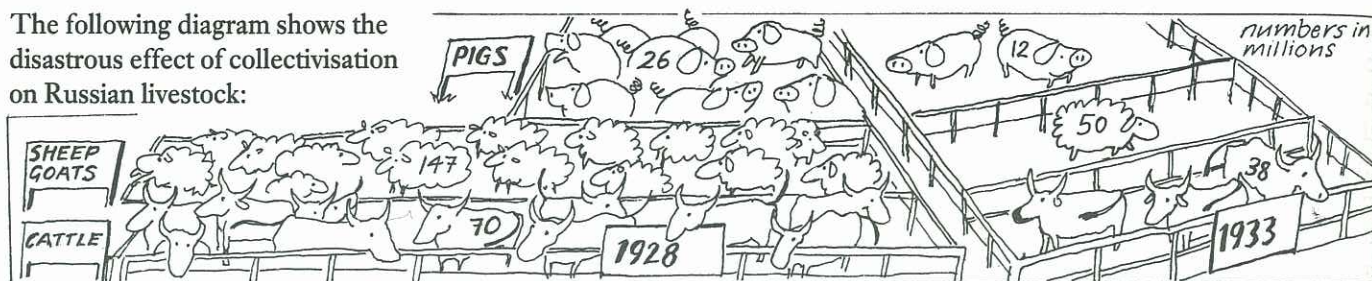


Figure 4 The decrease in the numbers of Russian livestock between 1928 and 1933

However, Stalin's treatment of the majority, the poor peasants, was not nearly so harsh as the way he treated the richer peasants. These were called 'kulaks'. These farmers and their families were removed from their land—over four million people. Some were sent to labour camps, some to farm in Siberia. The majority died in the appalling conditions.

Stalin's 'Terror'

Labour camps

Lenin's secret police, the Cheka, was greatly increased in size and power by Stalin and renamed the O.G.P.U. (later N.K.V.D.). During Stalin's time hardly anyone felt safe. Individuals would disappear in the middle of the night. Whole groups of people, like the kulaks for example, would be set to build towns, factories or communications systems in the bitterly cold expanses of northern Russia and Siberia. Stalin was so determined to transform Russia into a modern industrial country and so determined to crush all opposition that no human sacrifice was too big. Many millions of people died of starvation, disease, exhaustion or exposure to the cold.

One of the most famous Russians to have survived the labour camps and to have written about them is Alexander Solzhenitsyn. The following extract from his short novel,



A scene from the film, *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, showing labour camp prisoners. Why do you think we could not find a real photograph of a scene from within the labour camp?

One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich, will give you an idea of what conditions were like.

As usual, at five o'clock that morning reveille was sounded by the blows of a hammer on a length of rail hanging near the staff quarters. The intermittent sound barely penetrated the window-panes on which the frost lay two inches thick...

[Shukhov] didn't get up. He lay there in his bunk on the top tier, his head buried in a blanket and a coat, his two feet stuffed into one sleeve, with the end tucked under, of his wadded jacket...

Shukhov remembered that this morning his fate hung in the balance: they wanted to shift the 104th from the

building-shops to a new site, the 'Socialist Way of Life' settlement. It lay in open country covered with snow-drifts, and before anything else could be done there they would have to dig pits and put up posts and attach barbed wire to them. Wire themselves in, so that they couldn't run away. Only then would they start building.

There wouldn't be a warm corner for a whole month. Not a dog-kennel. And fires were out of the question. Where was the wood to come from?...

They sat in the cold mess-hall, most of them eating with their hats on, eating slowly, picking out putrid little fish from under the leaves of boiled black cabbage.

Stalin

Elimination of political opponents

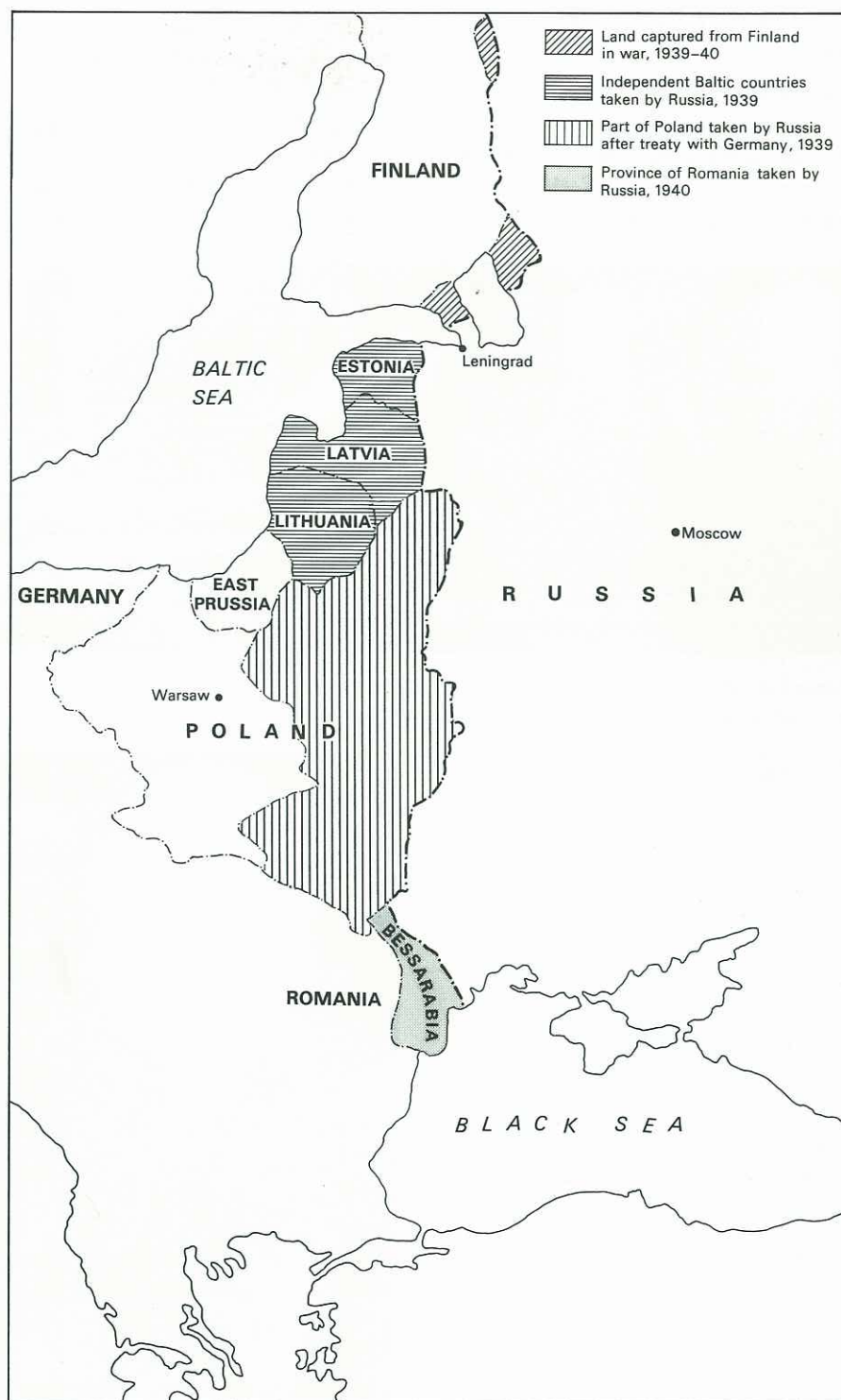
Stalin moved further and further away from the ideals of the revolution. He rid himself of all possible political opponents. Political leaders and ordinary party members and even generals were arrested. Many were executed, the rest were sent to the labour camps. In 1936 and 1937 great 'show trials' were held in Moscow. Leading members of the party (e.g. Zinoviev, Bukharin) confessed to the most incredible false charges of plotting against the government and Stalin. They had not been able to resist the persuasive methods of the N.K.V.D.! But Stalin's greatest enemy was still Trotsky. He was living in exile in Mexico. However, in 1940 one of Stalin's agents managed to enter his well-guarded house and smashed his skull with an ice-axe he had hidden in his coat pocket.

Foreign policy

One of the reasons that Stalin quarrelled with Trotsky was that Stalin wanted to concentrate on making Russia strong while Trotsky thought that Russia should concentrate on helping to spread Communism to other countries. An international organisation of Communist parties was set up—it was called the Comintern. Its headquarters was in Moscow. But Stalin did not help it very much.

Stalin did, however, help the Communists in Spain during the Spanish Civil War (see p. 63).

By August 1939 Europe was on the brink of the Second World War. In order to protect Russia against a possible attack from Germany, a treaty was signed between the two countries (see p. 68). By this treaty it was arranged that Poland should be divided between Russia and Germany. This treaty lasted until 1941



Map 3 Land gained by Russia, 1939-40

when the Germans invaded Russia.

Russia also took control of the small Baltic countries and, after a short but fierce war, parts of Finland. As a result of acquiring these lands

Russia regained much of the territory she lost after the First World War. These additions also meant that her western frontier was now further from Moscow.

Russia since 1945

The condition of Russia after the Second World War

Russia suffered more than any other country in the Second World War. Vast areas were fought over. Towns,

villages, communications systems and farm animals were efficiently destroyed. Probably 20 million people were killed. Russia emerged from the war a poor, exhausted and shattered country. Also, as we shall see in Chapter 9, for many years

after 1945 the Russian government devoted much of the country's resources to building up powerful armed forces. Compared with the countries of Western Europe, therefore, the standard of living remained very low.



Stalin's funeral. Beria (second from left) was chief of the secret police. He was executed not long afterwards. Malenkov, prime minister, 1953–55, is third from left; Bulganin, prime minister, 1955–58, is third from right.

Political control

Stalin's last years

Even in these dreadfully hard times, Stalin kept his terror system of secret police and labour camps. The chief of the secret police (by this time called M.V.D.) was Beria. Millions of men were sent to the labour camps—returning prisoners of war as well as those suspected of opposing Stalin. These men were used to develop the wastelands of Siberia and the Arctic.

'The Thaw'

Stalin died in 1953. The group of politicians who took over from him had Beria executed. From 1953 to 1964 the most important politician was Nikita Khrushchev. He was both prime minister and First Secretary of the Communist Party from 1958. He was a much more colourful personality than Stalin. He travelled more and tried to introduce a number of changes into Russia. At



Khrushchev at the United Nations. Here he is seen drawing attention to himself by pounding the desk with his fists. He seemed to be enjoying himself!

the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1956 Khrushchev made a speech attacking Stalin. As Stalin

had been almost worshipped in his lifetime, this came as a great surprise. In particular Khrushchev denounced Stalin for being